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ABSTRACT

The author discusses the processes of public relations and promotion as they relate specifically to university summer programs for high school students. He bases his conclusions on his experience with the Northwestern University Summer Speech Institute. Institute promotion activities fall into three areas: (1) direct advertising, through publications and correspondence, to potential institute students and those who know of their work; (2) development of a community awareness of the institute and its goals; and (3) development of a strong feeling for the institute within the college or university community. The author outlines in detail the procedures followed to implement each of these goals. (Author/PN)

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# Promoting the Summer Speech Institutes

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At the outset I should state that my deepening concern with Institute promotion over the past three years was completely unanticipated when I assumed the directorship almost three years ago. In a relatively short time I have come to believe that it is one of the more crucial aspects of institute administration.

In general, I take "promotion" to mean, simply, the stirring up of interest in an enterprise or an idea. In connection with Summer Speech Institutes I use the term to refer to three activities: (1) direct advertising to potential institute students and the people who know their work through publications and correspondence; (2) developing a community awareness of what the institute is and what it does; and (3) strengthening a feeling for the institute and its objectives within the university or college itself. The end product of each of these activities is identical, namely, a more effective summer program. In practice, I believe, the techniques are slightly different.

I do not propose that any amount or kind of promotional activity in itself, can make for effective institutes. I do maintain, however, that certain promotional practices can lead to an enhancement of the student's institute experience in two areas: quality and diversity of the student body and accomodation of students in academic and supporting facilities

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CS 500 138

once they arrive. I believe that it is easy to underestimate the impact of these two factors.

Northwestern's perennial feedback from its institute students puts these items near the top of the list. Next to increased competence and awareness of a particular discipline, which is ostensibly why they come, students find great personal value in residing and learning in the presence of a diverse fellowship--geographical, racially and economically. In order to maintain and increase this diversity without diluting quality aggressive promotion outside the university is becoming more necessary. The problem is greatest for the self-supporting institute, such as Northwestern's, which must host adequate numbers of full-paying students in order to provide financial aid to those in need.

An almost equally high priority of former students is the quality and accessibility of university services--housing, library, recreational facilities, performance and production areas, and the like. When reaction to such accommodation is negative, promotion within the university, or lack of it, I believe, is mainly at fault.

Northwestern's high school institute, now in its forty-third year, admits approximately 250 speech students who have completed their sophomore or junior years. The students come from 30 to 35 states to participate in a five-week, in-residence program in forensics, drama, communicative sciences and disorders, or radio-television-film. The programs are planned and advertised as advanced or accelerated work. I would like to discuss different promotional practices we have employed, and are initiating this year, to deal with the problems outlined above.

First, in the area of direct advertising and correspondence, more emphasis has been placed in expanding our pool of potential applicants. Although attractive layout and engaging copy have an important place, it is our feeling that too many thousands of potential students have never heard of any institute, let alone weighed the decision whether to apply.

This limitation is traceable in part to a previous reliance on too general a flyer describing not only the speech institute but those in journalism, engineering science, education and music as well. Because of the comprehensive nature, such a flyer is sent to a principal or guidance counselor, and for a host of complicated reasons is, in many cases, never posted. This all-inclusive bulletin will again be sent to some 3500 high schools in January but with few illusions, al least concerning the speech institute.

Also as in previous years, letters with applications and descriptive materials will be mailed to all teachers and counselors who have recommended a student during the past four years. Many institutes, I suspect, can rely on these regional or national pockets of support from high school faculty who are sympathetic with the goals of summer institutes and recommend talented students almost perennially.

In addition, specialized brochures dealing with only forensics, drama, communicative sciences, or radio-tv-film will be sent with letters to high school faculty in these specific areas. Names and addresses will come mainly form various association directories.

Institute students from last year will receive letters suggesting, quite accurately, that they are in a unique position to recommend fellow students to us, or vice versa, if they so desire. Scores of former students

do this anyway. Our hope is that more will do so if we take the initiative in indicating that we have respect for their opinion in these matters. A similar program has worked well regarding college freshmen at Northwestern.

Appropriate advertising will be placed in periodicals including Dramatics, The Speech Teacher, Media and Methods, and several high school newspapers. Finally, a direct mailing will be made to a selected number of high school juniors whose names will be provided through the university admissions office by the Educational Testing Service. We are told that a total of some four thousand names will be available, sorted according to academic interest. Exactly how many students we shall be able to reach in this way is impossible to predict.

Two implications emerge from this overall strategy. One, that we hope to put institute information in the hands of students who have never heard of us as well as reinforce the interest of those who have. Two, that this year's undertaking will be comparatively expensive. Our feeling is that the additional cost this year will, in all likelihood, not be repeated. By coding our own address differently in different pieces of promotion, and by making a systematic survey of the students as to how they learned of the program, we hope to measure the effect of the various approaches in drawing applications. Future years should benefit from these findings.

In the second major area of promotion, developing community awareness of the institute, mass media play the major role. Radio, television, newspapers and magazines are interested in institutes when goals are explained to them in a way that has relevance and public appeal.

In 1970 Teen magazine did a feature on Northwestern's entire institute. Frankly, I was dubious about what sort of image would be portrayed. And true, when the article was published, it did seem slightly obsessed with darkly handsome boys and vivacious, outspoken girls, but major focus was on young people striving for excellence. That was the peg. It made a good story, and it was an accurate reflection of one aspect of institute life.

The lesson is clear. On either a national or local basis, media are not particularly interested in the fact that many high school students are studying together; they might be interested in student opinions on news management, or an institute's emphasis on environmental engineering, or the current debate topic, or the fact that 16 and 17 years olds are learning how to educate the hearing impaired, and so.

The general press release describing all aspects of institute life can be replaced by the personal letter or phone call to an editor pointing up especially newsworthy facets of the summer program. The chances are good that subsequent coverage tells most of the story. In the past two years the Northwestern institute has received considerable space in all but one of the Chicago daily newspapers and two of the suburban weeklies.

During last summer, NBC in Chicago produced a half-hour program on the institute, and several students were invited to appear in a discussion on another program.

Another fairly helpful technique is to send announcements of institute participation to each of the student's home newspapers. These can be form releases with the student's name filled in unless several students

reside in the same area. In that case, all names should be included in a single release. Not all of them will be printed, but those that are add slightly to a community's awareness.

In the institute's own region such coverage, over the long term, heightens the community's accommodation of the students. And in a pragmatic sense, all such coverage contributes to the advertising effort.

Cultivating university support for summer institutes, the third major area of promotion, can be a difficult task. I refer, ideally, to the enthusiastic acceptance of institute students rather than grudging tolerance.

Partly because the institute is so temporary each year, university administrative personnel can have too little contact with the students themselves. What contact there is can take the form of dealing with immediate problems, sent up by name on an intricate chain of command. Unless measures are taken, students can become known as window breakers, library borrowing delinquents, sloppy eaters and unfeeling pranksters--typically because of a very few, frequently exaggerated occurences.

The ultimate problem is a general distrust and subsequent reluctance to make services available, be they borrrowing privileges, access to recreational facilities, or particularly desirable classroom allocations--in short, a less effective program. In moments of exasperation one can begin to believe that educational facilities exist in order to be clean and locked up.

The solutions, I believe, are hardly new ones; they are to maintain personal contact with members of the university or college community with whom there must be cooperation; and, second, to solicit their advice

seriously throughout the preparation of each summer's program. It is a sense of their own direct participation with something at stake in the institute which tends to create an administrative team.

Their services can be invaluable, not merely to fill pragmatic needs, but also in the generation of new ideas. Several recent directions in promotion, in fact, have grown out of discussions with personnel associated with university relations, the library, admissions office, campus security, and housing.

These, then, are the three areas of promotion I believe to be important. In references to specific measures, doubtless institute administrators have used most if not all of them in some combination before. They are, I am convinced, basic to the effective service to our institute students.